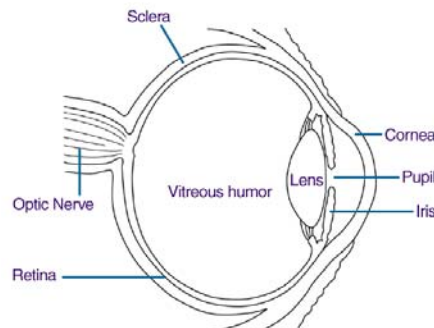


# GLAUCOMA

## WHAT IS GLAUCOMA?

**Glaucoma** is an eye condition that occurs when pressure builds up in the eye. The increased eye pressure can lead to damage to the back of the eye and the Optic nerve.



- Glaucoma causes about 15% of the cases of blindness in the United States.
- Because you can't feel increased eye pressure, you may not realize there is a problem.
- Half of the people who have glaucoma do not realize they have the disease until loss of vision has already begun.

## WHAT CAUSES GLAUCOMA?

It is not known why, but people with glaucoma typically experience an imbalance in eye fluid production and drainage. Fluid that normally flows in and out of the eye drains too slowly. As that fluid builds up, pressure in the eyeball increases and becomes abnormally high, a condition that can damage the optic nerve, the retina, or other parts of the eye.

There are also people with glaucoma who have "normal" eye pressure. For these people there are other factors at play that may lead to optic nerve damage.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

There are usually no symptoms during the early stages. As the disease progresses, you may notice the following:

- Failing side vision
- Difficulty adjusting eyes to dark rooms
- Blurred vision
- Eventual loss of vision
- In rare forms of glaucoma, the pressure in the eye may rise suddenly and be painful.



Normal Vision



Glaucoma Vision

## WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS?

- Elevated pressure in the eye
- High Blood Pressure
- Diabetes
- Aging
- African Ancestry (studies show that for unknown reasons, glaucoma presents at an earlier age in Blacks and is four times more likely to cause blindness in Blacks)

## HOW IS GLUACOMA DIAGNOSED?

Glaucoma can be detected in a complete eye examination where the eye care specialist places eye drops in the eye to enlarge or dilate the pupils.

Once the pupils are dilated, the specialist can look inside the eye and measure the eye pressure.

## HOW IS GLAUCOMA TREATED?

Though glaucoma is not curable, there are treatments that can successfully lower pressure in the eye:

- The first line of treatment is medication. If you are prescribed eye drops or pills, it is very important that you take the medication as prescribed.
- When glaucoma can't be controlled with medication, your eye specialist may turn to laser surgery in which a focused beam of light creates openings in the part of the eye where the fluid drains to make draining easier.
- The next line of treatment is a surgical procedure called "trabeculectomy" in which a small opening is made in the front chamber of the eye to make a new pathway from which fluid can drain.
- For those with very advanced disease, or when conventional medical and surgical treatments have failed to control the disease, glaucoma may be treated with a drainage device, a little plastic tube that is surgically implanted.

## HOW CAN I PREVENT GLAUCOMA?

Early detection through routine dilated eye examinations can prevent further vision loss. If you are in the high-risk groups for glaucoma—everyone over age

60, those with a family history of the disease, and Blacks over age 40—you should get a complete dilated eye exam at least every two years.



## REFERENCES / LINKS

American Diabetic Association

<http://www.diabetes.org/>

National Eye Institute:

[http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/glaucoma/glaucoma\\_facts.htm](http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/glaucoma/glaucoma_facts.htm)

Prevent Blindness America

[http://www.preventblindness.org/eye\\_problems/doc\\_checklist.html](http://www.preventblindness.org/eye_problems/doc_checklist.html)

US Food and Drug Administration: FDA Consumer Magazine

[http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2002/202\\_eyes.html](http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2002/202_eyes.html)

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER



### When you call to make an appointment:

- Be prepared to describe any vision problems you are having
- Ask if you will be able to drive yourself home

### Before you go in for your examination

#### Make a list of the following:

- Signs or symptoms of eye problems that you have noticed (flashes of light, difficulty seeing at night, temporary double vision, loss of vision, for example)
- Eye injuries or eye surgery you have had (approximate dates and where you were treated)
- Prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking
- Questions about your vision
- Your general health condition (allergies, chronic health problems, operations)
- Family history of eye problems (glaucoma, cataracts, etc.)

#### Take along the following:

- Your glasses, contact lenses or both
- All prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking

### During the examination:

- Ask questions about anything that seems unclear to you, such as the names and purposes of tests you may undergo
- Ask if there are any changes since your last exam
- Asks when is the best time to call with questions

- Find out when you should return for your next exam

### General Questions To Ask About Your Vision:

- What changes can I expect in my vision?
- Will my vision loss get worse? How much of my vision will I lose/
- Will regular eyeglasses improve my vision?
- What medical/surgical treatments are available for my condition?
- What can I do to protect or prolong my vision?
- Will diet, exercise or other lifestyle change help?
- If my vision can't be corrected, can you refer me to a specialist in low vision?
- Where can I get vision rehabilitation?
- Will any special devices help me with daily activities like reading, sewing, cooking, or fixing things around the house?
- What training and services are available to help me live better and more safely with vision problems?

**There are two key people on your health care team, you and your health care provider. You are just as important as your provider in directing your health care. The first step you should take in becoming an active team member of your health care team is to understand what you are being treated for and why. Continue to ask questions until you understand the answer. By paying attention to your health and maintaining your own records, you will become an active, informed decision maker in your health care.**



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